

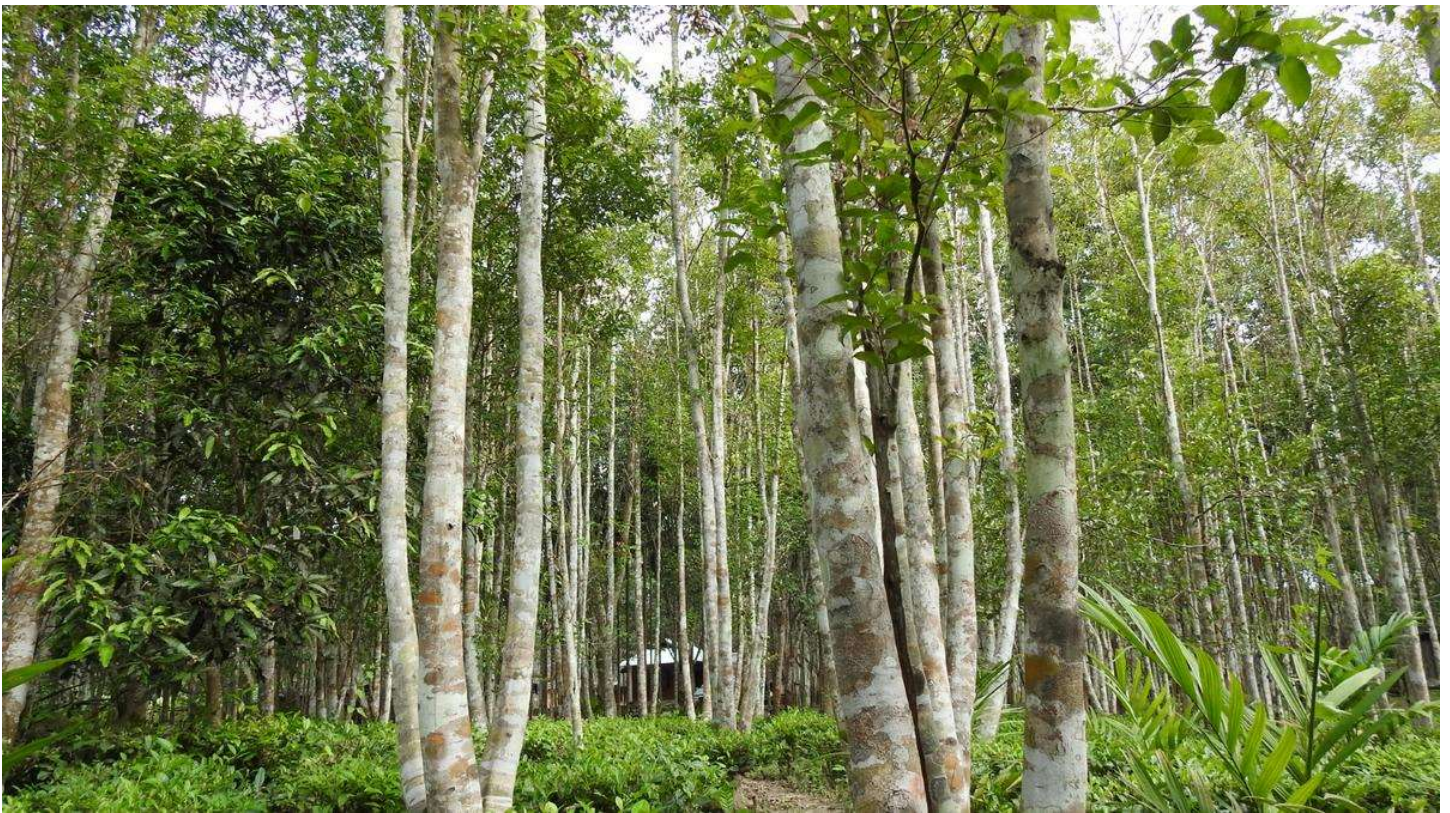
# CITES eases export of agarwood from India, move to benefit lakhs of farmers

Given that agarwood is cultivated in different parts of India, especially in the northeast, the development is going to benefit lakhs of farmers in Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura

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*Aquilaria malaccensis* (agarwood) is utilised in numerous applications such as in the aroma industry, in medicine preparations, preparations of air fresheners and purifiers. | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

India has successfully prevented inclusion of *Aquilaria malaccensis* (agarwood) in the Review of Significant Trade (RST) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The CITES also notified a new export quota of highly valuable and aromatic resinous wood and oil of *Aquilaria malaccensis* (agarwood) from India from April 2024.

Since agarwood is cultivated in different parts of India, especially in the northeast, the development is going to benefit lakhs of farmers in certain districts of Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and Tripura.

*Aquilaria malaccensis* was listed in Appendix II of CITES for the first time in 1995 based on India's proposal at CoP9 in 1994. The removal of India from the RST for *Aquilaria malaccensis* was achieved based on a non-detriment findings (NDFs) study of the plant species by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI), Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

The NDF prepared by the BSI suggested that "harvesting of plants or collection of seeds/ seedlings/saplings and other propagules should not be allowed from the existing wild populations or plants in the protected areas and reserve forests".

However, the NDF added that harvest of plants should be allowed from home/community gardens, plantations on leased/*patta* lands, private or community plantations, or any other types of small-scale/large-scale plantations.

The export quota recommended by the NDF for 2024–2027 stands at agarwood chips and powder/sawdust is 1,51,080 kg/year and agarwood oil is 7,050 kg/year.

"The absence of an export quota for a long period and other trade-related restrictions in India caused an increase in informal trade/export of agar chips, oil, powder etc. to the Middle East and other foreign countries. It also caused an increase in costs of agarwood chips and oil in the global market as India is a major agarwood trading nation with which most importing countries have long trade records." the NDF report said.

Despite the export ban, the illegal trade of agarwood and its derivatives has continued in India, with more than 1.25 tonnes of chips and 6 litres of oil/derivatives reportedly seized in six states of India between 2017 and 2021, a report by TRAFFIC suggested.

Though India had an export quota since November 2021, the growers and farmers were unable to trade agarwood legally due to imposing several legal restrictions that led them towards informal traders.



The team of BSI scientists and researchers who conducted the NDF study on *Aquilaria malaccensis* (agarwood). | Photo Credit: Special Arrangement

Avishek Bhattacharjee, scientist of BSI was the principal investigator of the NDF project commissioned by the BSI, MoEFCC and led a team of scientists, scientific staff, and project assistants from the BSI.

In four months the team of scientists and researchers made more than 25 field trips to assess the population of the species in the wild and cultivation. A.A. Mao, the Director of BSI was the project coordinator of the study that found that *Aquilaria malaccensis* is one of the highest cultivated species in Northeast India.

“It is also in cultivation in other parts of the country. The present study estimates not less than 139.89 million [13.989 crores] plants in India,” the NDF said.





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It is also interesting how under natural conditions, the agar is formed due to fungus-host interaction, which usually occurs after boring by the larvae of a stem borer, *Neurozerra conferta* Walker. The natural infection by certain fungi and bacteria starts in the wood of *A. malaccensis* after boring by the stem borer.

Usually, plants above the age of seven years are vulnerable to infection by the fungus. However, the initiation of natural infection is observed in several plants with an age of less than two years in certain parts of Assam, Manipur, and Tripura.

Agar production can also be induced artificially by several techniques, which may be broadly classified into physical, chemical, and biological methods or combinations. The

ideal age for artificial inoculation is six to eight years and this is practised in all the agarwood cultivating states where the natural infection rate is low or absent.

Highly valued for its traditional uses as incense, the extracts (agarwood oil) of plants are also used in water-based perfumes. Agarwood is also utilised in numerous applications such as in the aroma industry, in medicine preparations, preparations of air fresheners and purifiers. The essential oil extracted from agarwood has anti-inflammatory, anti-rheumatic, analgesic and anti-oxidant properties.